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To the Editor
San Francisco Chronicle

Capital punishment may not be the most urgent of our social problems, but its perpetuation in this state is almost too revealing of fundamental aspects of human nature. I hope our legislators will not overlook that responsibility to forward the ideals of their constituency on which representative government depends.

Before ~~it~~ moving to California, I lived many years in the State of Wisconsin which had abolished capital punishment some time ago. There never was the slightest indication, nor has any objective evidence ever been forwarded, that this restraint has encouraged capital crimes. Experts have repeatedly pointed out that so long as any homicides evade punishment, and certainly some do, the certainty of being caught and held to account would be the most effective deterrent, regardless of whether a small fraction of crimes evoke the death penalty.

What would we lose by abolition? We would lose a source of serious division in our community. We would lose the satisfaction of social revenge which hides behind the justification of deterrence. We would lose the expensive and long-drawn out legal procedures that must surround capital punishment and could otherwise be simplified. We would lose the risk and uncertainty -- which may be the real reason behind the angry aggression felt by many citizens -- of the irretrievable punishment of the innocent, as ~~it~~ must sometimes happen, however rarely. We would lose the temptation to extreme violence now given to psychopathic personalities who may be more excited than deterred by the possibility of a capital judgment of his crimes and the attention they then receive. We would lose the lurid reporting of murder trials that now disgraces even the better of our newspapers.

Yours

We might gain a small step towards the rational treatment of crime as social injury, and towards the reinstatement of charity as an element in our human relations.

Joshua Lederberg

CC: Gov. Brown